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Parkinson's Disease Psychosis and the Marketing of Pimavanserin

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Abstract

In 2016, Nuplazid (pimavanserin) became the first FDA-approved treatment for Parkinson's Disease Psychosis (PDP). We explored the possibility that PDP was a term created to market Nuplazid. We examined trends in perceptions of psychosis in Parkinson's disease from the 1990s to 2020 through MEDLINE search term frequency, neurology textbooks, guidance from professional societies, Acadia annual reports, sponsored websites, and a sponsored meeting held by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). We analyzed continuing medical education (CME) activities on PDP and analyzed the connection between payments by the manufacturer of pimavanserin and prescriptions. Our analysis of nine sponsored CME activities reveals misleading themes, including: PDP is common, progressive, and not always drug-induced; there is no such thing as a benign hallucination, and psychotic symptoms always worsen; PDP increases mortality; and competing treatments are ineffective or dangerous while pimavanserin is safe and effective for treating PDP. Industry-sponsored CME was used to disseminate inaccurate and misleading marketing messages on psychosis related to Parkinson's disease. Some professional societies and some textbooks also resisted the PDP label. Reframing PDP as a unique condition is a typical example of condition branding. The establishment of PDP expanded the use of pimavanserin and is likely to have resulted in many avoidable deaths.

Keywords: condition branding; continuing medical education; parkinson's disease psychosis; pharmaceutical marketing.

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